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This Is Why Eminem Is The Best Battle Rapper Ever

King Mathers!
By Rob Markman
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October 17, 2014 / 3:33 PM
At its very core, hip-hop is competitive. In the late-1970s, pioneering MCs started out boasting about their DJs' supremacy during park jams, before developing their own (alter)egos and rivalries among each other.

These days, battle rap has reached new heights with fans paying big bucks to watch their favorite matches in a Pay-Per-View-style format. And network and music executives have fed the beast, booking lyrical titans for awards show performances, right alongside their platinum-selling counterparts.

Guys like Murda Mook, Loaded Lux, Arsonal, Daylyt, Charlie Clips and the organizers of the Smack and URL battle leagues deserve all the credit; but when it's all said and done, it's Eminem who reigns as battle rap's best.

Marshall's 2002 film "8 Mile" was partly-based on real-life events, and the battle scenes vividly captured Em's come-up. In fact, it was Eminem's second-place finish finish at the 1997 Rap Olympics that helped land him on Interscope and, eventually, Dr. Dre's radar. And we all know what happened after that.

Eminem dropped his major-label debut album, *The Slim Shady LP,* in 1999 and never looked back. He's sold more records than any other hip-hop artist, thanks to his classic albums and unforgettable singles like "Lose Yourself," "Not Afraid" and "Love the Way You Lie." For the most successful rapper in the world to be birthed from an underground battle circuit speaks volumes.

The game's top rap-battle stars have been trying to figure out how to make the transition from lyrical prize-fighters to top-selling artists for years. What most find is that writing hit records is different than writing stinging punchlines. And there's a real stigma that comes with that: Many rap fans believe that battled-tested MCs just aren't fit for the studio, where hooks and song structure become essential. Not that the wide-sweeping assumption has stopped battle rap's top names from hitting the booth.

After stealing the show at the televised 2014 BET Hip Hop Awards on Tuesday by throwing shots at Drake, Murda Mook followed up by releasing an 11-track mixtape, *Eazy Doez It,* earlier this week. Loaded Lux dropped his *You Gon Get This Work* mixtape last year and Pittsburgh battle rapper Real Deal is prepping his independent album *Mountains and Molehills*.

While battle rap is far more lucrative now than it was in Eminem's day, you can bet that today's top battle MCs would love at shot *Billboard,* even though some already make a heck of a living on competitions, showcases and other potentially lucrative opportunities.

What's interesting however, is that Em is going back to his roots.

This year, his Shady Records label spearheaded the Total Slaughter Pay-Per-View rap battle and put a mainstream scope on battle rap. Now that he's built a platform, some are wondering if Eminem will return to the ring in the next Total Slaughter battle. Mook certainly wants a shot at Slim Shady. "For the last five years I've been saying, 'Y'all have to go get Eminem for me. You have to,' " he told Hot 97 earlier this year.

Whether Eminem can still compete with today's top battle lyricists remains to be seen; as far as we know he hasn't engaged in a live rap battle in over 15 years (save for his 2004 battle with our very own Sway Calloway). Still, no matter where he fits in today's battle landscape, until another MC makes a transition as impactful as Marshall's, he will forever be battle rap's king.